Barr halts transfer of documents on Iraq

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The administration has stopped transferring classified documents to a congressional committee investigating U.S. policy toward Iraq, accusing the panel's chairman of endangering national security.

The chairman of the House Banking Committee, Texas Democrat Henry Gonzalez, responded by accusing the administration of trying to obstruct Congress.

The dueling May 15 letters between Mr. Gonzalez and Attorney General William P. Barr were the latest skirmish in the administration's fight with the feisty lawmaker seeking to expose what he calls the "flawed and tragic policy" that led to the war with Iraq.

Mr. Barr told Mr. Gonzalez that his recent statements in Congress — based in part on thousands of classified documents he had requested from the administration — "raised serious concerns." He said further documents would be withheld unless Mr. Gonzalez promised to keep them secret.

"Public disclosure of classified information harms the national security," Mr. Barr wrote. Copies of the letters were obtained Sunday by The Associated Press.

In his same-day response, Mr. Gonzalez said the administration had been "reluctant" to cooperate because his committee is investigating the extent of U.S. aid to Iraq in the 1980s.

"Now your letter suggests that the Bush administration plans to move from foot dragging to outright obstruction," Mr. Gonzalez wrote.

He said the documents he had made public this year to buttress a series of floor statements all dealt with past policies not ongoing operations. "None of the statements and none of the documents compromise . . . the national security or intelligence sources or methods."

Mr. Gonzalez demanded that Mr. Barr say specifically which documents had harmed what aspects of U.S. security. "You should not hide behind generalities about 'national security,' " he wrote.